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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO IMMEDIATE 0157
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 000390

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/A AND NEA/IR

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [IR](#) [AF](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ DEPUTY FM ON IRAN, SCO SUMMIT, INTERNAL
POLITICS

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Classified By: Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(U) This is an Action Request; see para 11 below.

12. (C) Summary. In a relaxed, informal setting, DCM met with Kyrgyz Deputy FM Kadyrbek Sarbayev on April 7 and discussed at length a range of issues, including U.S.-Iran tensions; the upcoming SCO summit, including Russian and Chinese pressure to close Manas Air Base; the EU's Central Asia strategy; the MFA's recent positive outreach to NGO's; perspectives on the new Foreign Minister, and Sarbayev's personal views on the current internal political crisis. End Summary.

Iran: Looming confrontation with the U.S.?

13. (C) Sarbayev was concerned that the U.S. was intentionally heading into a military confrontation with Iran. He said he was worried about the recent U.S. naval buildup in the Gulf, and raised current speculation in Kyrgyzstan that the Manas coalition air base might be used for air strikes against Iran. In Teheran, Sarbayev said, the Iranians are taking civil defense precautions. Western embassies are considering evacuating their families, and the Kyrgyz mission in Iran is also planning evacuation contingencies. He listened, but was not persuaded by DCM's arguments that the U.S. wants a diplomatic resolution and current military maneuvers in the Gulf are designed to increase political pressure on Iran and do not presage armed conflict. Sarbayev agreed that Russia and China are moving closer to the U.S. position, as they too are disillusioned by Iranian actions. Sarbayev said that Iran will be invited to

the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in August, as one of four SCO observers, but the level of Iranian representation has not been determined (he did not rule out Ahmadinejad.) &It all depends on the outcome of the UN Security Council discussions and the resolution,8 Sarbayev explained.

SCO Summit: Afghanistan on the agenda, and Manas

14. (C) Sarbayev said that the Kyrgyz plan to put Afghanistan on the SCO summit agenda, and want to invite President Karzai to attend. He said the Kyrgyz would appreciate U.S. help to convince Karzai to come. Sarbayev added that Kyrgyzstan has consulted with all SCO members, and all have agreed to putting Afghanistan on the agenda. He explained this Kyrgyz initiative by noting that Russia and China will pressure Kyrgyzstan to close Manas air base; in Sarbayev's words, it won't be just a difficult issue, it will be &painful.8 Having Afghanistan on the agenda could help make the case that the base plays a useful regional security role. The rest of the agenda is not yet firm; the next 1-2 months will be key, Sarbayev said. SCO Defense Ministers will meet in May; the FM's in June. He urged the U.S. to reach out to China and Russia directly in capitals to explain the importance of our operations in Afghanistan for regional security, and the base's role in combating terrorism. Sarbayev said the Kyrgyz are very concerned with Afghan plans to close their Bishkek Embassy soon; and asked whether the U.S. could help encourage Kabul to keep its mission open at least through the SCO summit. The Kyrgyz are also worried about recent news reports that Karzai has reached out to the Taliban; this undermines support for the base, and raises security concerns for Kyrgyzstan, should the Taliban join the government.

EU's Central Asia strategy:

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15. (C) Briefly discussing the recent EU meeting with Central Asia FM's in Astana, Sarbayev said Kyrgyzstan appreciated being consulted by the EU on its strategy. However, he said it was a bit as if Europe treats the region like children: in a family, parents ask children what kind of pet they would like, and listen to what they say, but the parents alone will decide whether they end up getting a dog, a turtle or a fish, regardless what they asked for. For the EU not to invite regional representatives to the June Brussels Summit that will roll out its Central Asia strategy would be a &huge mistake,8 according to Sarbayev. Why, he asked, would Nazarbayev or any other regional leader take the EU seriously -- especially on issues like democracy and human rights -- when they appear to dictate to the region in such a paternalistic way?

NGO meeting with Foreign Minister

16. (C) Sarbayev characterized FM Karabayev's April 6 meeting with international NGO's and assistance implementers as a first step in engaging civil society in Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy. Sarbayev claimed he and the two other deputy ministers have been briefing Karabayev daily, and one issue they've pressed on has been the need to engage NGOs in foreign policy (Sarbayev said former FM Jekshenkulov had no desire to hear any outside opinions). Earlier, Karabayev had first met with Kyrgyz NGOs. Now that the FM has blessed and inaugurated the idea of positive engagement with NGOs, it will be easier to resolve issues. Sarbayev said the MFA wants to standardize issues of accreditation and social fund payments, and recognizes the regulations have not been clear or evenly applied in the past.

FM Karabayev: Breath of Fresh Air

17. (C) Sarbayev said the difference between current FM Karabayev and his predecessor, Jekshenkulov, is like night

and day. Jekshenkulov made life miserable for all his deputies, according to Sarbayev. He was difficult to approach, and never listened to more than 10% of the advice Sarbayev gave him. Sarbayev said it was "impossible" to work with him, and the pro-Moscow Jekshenkulov dismissed all arguments made in support of maintaining balanced relations with Europe and the U.S., or even with China (all of which are Sarbayev,s portfolios). In contrast, Karabayev is a breath of fresh air, and Sarbayev visibly relaxed when describing the difference, as if a great load has been lifted from him. Karabayev listens to his deputies, Sarbayev said; he may not always agree, but he is taking in 90%, and understands the strategic benefit to Kyrgyzstan of maintaining better relations with the West. With this in mind, Sarbayev said the Minister planned to offer a dinner in coming days for senior U.S. Embassy staff and senior MFA staff to encourage closer ties.

Kulov-Bakiyev: No Exit

18. (C) Sarbayev said he sees no resolution to the current internal political impasse, and appealed for outside mediation to bring the two sides together. The DCM responded that the Kyrgyz need to resolve this themselves, but perhaps the OSCE could play a helpful role. Sarbayev said the OSCE should engage vigorously, implying the U.S. should help ensure OSCE action. Sarbayev said Bakiyev had made an incredibly brave gesture in nominating Atambayev as PM -- a gesture he, Sarbayev, would never have had the guts to do in Bakiyev,s place -- but in response, Kulov has done nothing

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to meet Bakiyev halfway. Sarbayev said Kulov, even after two years as PM, doesn,t have the money to finance the demonstrations for more than a few days, at the cost of 500 som per person per day. Sarbayev speculated that there must be outside interventions and it appeared that Russia was financing Kulov. He mentioned the recent press account of Deputy Speaker Isabekov's claims that Russia has picked a successor to Kulov, the son of a former Kyrgyz General Aliyev. Sarbayev said the younger Aliyev has Russian citizenship and lives there.

19. (C) Sarbayev also questioned Kulov,s reform credentials, saying real reform requires younger leaders; Kulov is of an older generation and just wants to bring Bakiyev down through street protests. Sarbayev asked whether the U.S. could encourage Edil Baisalov to work with Atambayev to join the government; the DCM replied that although Baisalov is in the U.S., we would have no contact with him until later in the month, and we weren,t even sure he,d been in touch with anyone here. Sarbayev claimed that Baisalov turned down Atambayev,s offer for a cabinet position.

Comment

110. (C) Kyrgyz interlocutors from the Prime Minister on down raise with us in every meeting their concern over a possible U.S.-Iran confrontation. The issue colors Kyrgyz perceptions of the Manas Air Base, which in their eyes could make Kyrgyzstan a target of Iranian retribution. Sarbayev is charged with coordinating the MFA's input into the SCO summit, and will be a useful interlocutor as preparations for the August event proceed. His warnings about Chinese and Russian pressure on Kyrgyzstan over Manas Air Base warrant attention, and the Kyrgyz initiative to put Afghanistan on the agenda could be an intriguing effort to deflect Moscow and Beijing. Sarbayev clearly believes he has more influence with, and more respect for, Karabayev than was the case with Jekshenkulov.

Action Request

111. (C) We are not sure it will be possible to keep Manas Air Base off the SCO agenda, and thus we believe it would be useful to have Afghan President Karzai, who attended the

Shanghai SCO summit, inside the tent carrying the water. We recommend the Department consider encouraging Karzai to attend the August Bishkek SCO summit. The Department may also wish to consider tailored demarches in SCO capitals outlining our redlines as the agenda is being developed. Finally, the Ambassador is meeting tomorrow with the resident Afghan Ambassador and will ask if in fact they are closing their mission in Bishkek. If that is the case, post may request Department's assistance to persuade Kabul to at least keep the mission open through the SCO summit.

YOVANOVITCH